

# The plan of God about the family in the Holy Scripture

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## Introduction

God has a plan for the family. Does this mean that He imposes something on the human being which is totally alien to our human nature? This could be the first question to answer and to think about. Yet, others come up. Since we consider the Holy Scripture in Israel as the vehicle of life experiences, we have to attend to the various experiences of Israel and how it came to terms with family and family ties. These life experiences set up as faith experiences as well. Being so, they manage to set up a dialogue between God and mankind in what family concerns. God sets up a project within these life experiences, up from these faith experiences. God inspires the model of monogamic family right from creation in Genesis. This is the origin, not the beginning. The model God proposes as the best for humankind has to deal with various kinds of families throughout Israel history. It is necessary to see how it came to become the most common one, the most familiar one. The history of Israel is not even in what family concerns. By the times of Jesus Israel kept dubious about it. The family of God is found in Israel. But it took its time.

Here we need to assess the discussion Jesus had with the Pharisees. What was at stake? What kind of family Jesus preaches? In what kind of family has does He lived and wanted to live in? Why did He depart from his home land, from his household? How can we combine the radical critique of Jesus on account

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of the divorce with Mathew and Pauline tradition on that?<sup>1</sup> Some classical texts will have to be revisited in the New Testament. This review will not follow the paths neither of feminist exegesis nor of gay exegesis, how much sophisticated it might appear. In fact, the role of the reader is there overloaded. That's why is not convincing. On the other hand, the gospel of Thomas will not be put up at the same level of canonical gospels, despite the historical interest it might have to draw a picture of diversity at the beginning of Christian tradition from the second century on. That's the reason why.

## 1. The Israelite geographical family

When we talk about family in the history of Israel we have to pay attention to the land and to the house extension it occupied. The Old Testament presents three terms to sort out the family in Israel: the «tribe» (*sebet*), the «clan» (*mishpahah*), and the «family» (*bet-ab*)<sup>2</sup>. In the Israelite census of Num 1,4, the «matteh» is the equivalent to *sebet* (tribe). With these terms, Israel builds the territorial identity of a family. Thus, in Jos 7,16–18 we find patronymic names which define a family identity according to its territory or descendents<sup>3</sup>:

«<sup>16</sup> So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken. <sup>17</sup> And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken. <sup>18</sup> And he brought his household man by man; and Akhan, the son of Karmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe [*mishpahah*] of Judah, was taken».

Akhan son of Karmi is a patronymic name, he receives the name from his father whose father is Zabdi (grandfather and chief of his *bet-ab*). The *mishpahah* gathered a group of families (*bet-ab*). It was an enlarged family that survived with endogamic relationships in order to preserve property and lands. David belonged to the ephrathite *mishpahah* in 1 Sam 17,12 and Saul came from the matriti *mishpahah* in 1 Sam 10,20-21:

«<sup>20</sup> And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. <sup>21</sup> When he had caused the tribe [*sebet*] of Benjamin to come near by their families [*mishpahôt*], the family [*mishpahat*] of Matri

<sup>1</sup> We reassume here some biblical texts commented in our recent work «The Christian marriage according to Nazareth and Paul», *Cauriensia* 8 (2013) 215-239.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. U. WOLFF, «Some Remarks on the Tribes and Clans in Israel», *JQR* 36 (1946) 287-295; C. J. H. WRIGHT, «Family», *ABD* II (1992) 761.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. U. WOLFF, «Terminology of Israel's Tribal Organization», *JBL* 65 (1946) 45-49.

was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found».

These terms are translated in the Septuaginta with the greek «oikos» (house / home). Jesus lives in an «oikos» (*bet-ab*), for Joseph belongs to the «oikos of David» (Lk 1,27), but in Lk 2,4 Joseph belongs to the homeland [*patrias*] of David. The Septuaginta translates *mishpahah* also by «phylê», «genetês» (Lev 25,47), by «homeland» («*patriá*» Dt 29,17) and «geneas» (Jer 10,25). Either in the *mishpahah* or in the *sebet* or in the *bet-ab* God created community and relationships among one another. The *mishpahah* can be called a clan, a group of *bet-ab* / *bet-abôt*. The larger family unity in Israel was the tribe (the *sebet*) composed of several *mishpahôt*.<sup>4</sup> The smallest family unity was the *bet-ab*, which in Old Testament days had neither the size nor the number nowadays have many families. Nevertheless, each one mirrored in its own way the relationship of trust, love and familiarity God maintained with Israel. It is true that these families (larger or smaller in extension and in number) obeyed to territorial criteria. In a patriarchal society like that one, the patronymic names gave the identity and the place in the family. Families were identified according to fatherly bonds, according to patrilineal and patrilocal criteria<sup>5</sup>. This fashioned as well the image itself of God in Israel. God Himself allowed it very patiently. He respected the growth and the evolution since the days of the Patriarchs, when polygamy was tolerated with practically no bias to face to. God abode in these families, and in these families love and life did abide, despite all the differences and contingencies. By the time of the prophets, the focus remained on *faithfulness*. Yet, now monogamic families began to mirror this faithfulness, either of God Himself either between husband and wife. So we have been given the beautiful poem which is Song of Songs.

This *faithfulness* was protected by the law, and it was ordered by the law to protect the families in Israel. That was the case in the jubilee (cf. Lev 25), in sabbatical years (cf. Lev 23). Then a new possibility was given to the family to regain their land in order to survive amidst all the other families that formed the great family of the people of Israel. This rest was ordered by the law in order to protect the family as such. The law God gave to Moses enforced some obligations which enabled families to remain faithful to the plans God had to Israel and to each and every family of His people.

Moreover, when a husband died in the enlarged family, then the brother-in-law had the commitment to give an heir, a male heir in order to make the name of the family survive. Thus he would liberate the family from the possibility of

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<sup>4</sup> To evaluate the extension of these sociological entities see, e.g., the classical work of NORMAN K. GOTTWALD, *The Tribes of Jahweh*, Maryknoll 1979, 301-305.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. J. H. WRIGHT, «Family», *ABD* II (1992) 762.

extinction. He would thus become a *redeemer*, a liberator. According to the laws of levirate marriage, the «redeemer» (the *go'el*) «was supposed to raise a male heir for a deceased relative»<sup>6</sup>:

«<sup>5</sup> When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, <sup>6</sup> and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. <sup>7</sup> But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me'. <sup>8</sup> Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, 'I have no desire to marry her', <sup>9</sup> then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, 'This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house'. <sup>10</sup> Throughout Israel his family shall be known as 'the house of him whose sandal was pulled off'» (Dt 25,5-10).

These laws enhanced the survival of the family and allowed the fulfillment of God's plan «to be fruitful and to multiply» (Gen 1,28). That's why Israel protected life right since pregnancy, for life belongs to God who creates male and female in His own image (v.27):

«<sup>22</sup> When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine» (Ex 21,22).

Therefore, it's no wonder that the sixth commandment and the law protected a couple's ties of love in order to give real and concrete meaning to what faithfulness is. The relationships of faithfulness give truthfulness and access to God's faithfulness. The paired reciprocity between man and woman, male and female, husband and wife paves the way to access the experience of God's faithfulness. This means that God's plan charted out a milieu where we can be taught His own plan. In other words, family, a home built upon the relationship of love and faithfulness between a man and a woman, teaches God's own plan of faithfulness throughout history, giving human face and flesh to God's plan. That's why divorce was forbidden by the law, because it comes up as a disruptive cut off of God's alliance. Divorce shatters faithfulness. It is a rupture in marriage. So, it rips apart the possibility of giving sight to God's plan of faithfulness.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. C. J. H. WRIGHT, «Family», *ABD* II (1992) 763.

## 2. The most disputed text of Mal 2,16

By the time of the prophets, Israel maintained the oral law alongside the written law. But, some oral laws (from the *torah she bê-âlpêh*) were introduced in the written sinaitic law (*torah she biktav*), thus becoming written law. The prophets had to announce marriage between a man and a woman as a token of God's faithfulness. The blessed couple was endeavored to mirror the faithfulness of God from the betrothal's pledge on. This way the couple accomplished the promise of God right from Gen 1,27 («God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them») and Gen 2,24 («Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh»). Nevertheless, after Moses Israel squeezed some of its oral traditions into the written law in order to level it up into the written law. The Pharisees and the priests managed to justify their behavior. Moses, they said, allowed them to write the famous *sepher keritut* (the written and legal order of divorce). In this process the woman was not taken into account at all. In the most subtle way, they justified that proceeding arguing that thus the woman remained protected. In legal terms, this practice was supported by Dt 24,1-4, what gave a very lawful appearance to the entire process:

«And if any one should take a wife, and should dwell with her, then it shall come to pass if she should not have found favour before him, because he has found some unbecoming thing in her, that he shall write for her a bill of divorcement, and give it into her hands, and he shall send her away out of his house. <sup>2</sup> And if she should go away and be married to another man; <sup>3</sup> and the last husband should hate her, and write for her a bill of divorcement; and should give it into her hands, and send her away out of his house, or the last husband should die, who took her to himself for a wife; <sup>4</sup> the former husband who sent her away shall not be able to return and take her to himself for a wife, after she has been defiled; because it is an abomination before the Lord thy God, and ye shall not defile the land, which the Lord thy God gives thee to inherit».

When Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees He knows very well the sly and crafty arguments they used and wanted to be justified:

«When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. <sup>2</sup> Large crowds followed him, and he cured them there. <sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?' <sup>4</sup> He answered, 'Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' <sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.» <sup>7</sup> They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?' <sup>8</sup> He said to them, 'It was because

you were so hard-hearted [*sklerokardian*] that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity / immorality [*porneia*], and marries another commits adultery'» (Mt 19,1-9).

But Jesus knows too the sixth commandment and the radical critique God made on divorce through the words of prophet Mal 2,10-16:

«<sup>10</sup> Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors? <sup>11</sup> Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this – any to witness or answer, or to bring an offering to the Lord of hosts. <sup>13</sup> And this you do as well: You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. <sup>14</sup> You ask, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. <sup>15</sup> Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth. <sup>16</sup> For *I hate divorce*, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless».

The utmost disputed text of Mal 2,16 comes from the customs reform in the era of the books of Chronicles. The influence of Esdras and Nehemiah's late deuteronomistic reform kept its pace, since the main concern was to keep up in terms with the Law, trying to maintain Israel faithful to the torah, therefore, faithful to the torah teachings concerning betrothal and marriage<sup>7</sup>. Marriage was viewed as a sign and mirror to the alliance God made with Israel. This tradition comes very early in the prophets in Israel (cf. Jer 3,8.11.20; 5,11; 9,1; 12,1.6; Os 6,7). To divorce was seen as the same as to break the alliance. To prevent that to happen, and to foster better conditions for that not to happen, mixed marriages were forbidden, because when a Jew married a foreign woman he put himself very near to foreign divinities<sup>8</sup>. Marriage within Judaism and Israel was enhanced as a way to achieve God's plan according to the book of Genesis, because the main goal was to live according to the sinaitic law God revealed to Moses in which the sixth commandment forbids to commit adultery. Therefore, mixed

<sup>7</sup> Cf. VINCENZO LOPASSO, «Unicità di Dio e matrimonio in Malachia 2,10-16», *Vivarium* 21/2 (2013) 125.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. A. SHIELDS, «Syncretism and Divorce in Malachi 2,10-16», *ZAW* 111 (1999) 71.

marriages were seen as a serious danger to the Jewish faith<sup>9</sup>: «in the postexilic period stricter demands were made on the marriage bond, apparently in connection with the prohibition of marriages with Canaanites and heathen people in general (Ex 34,16; Dt 7,4). The prophecy of Malachi endorses these stricter stipulations, and provides in this respect the ultimate in OT revelation»<sup>10</sup>. These late regulations were moved into the Pentateuch at a later phase, probably in the post-P material:

«<sup>15</sup> You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. <sup>16</sup> And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods» (Ex 34,15-16).

The verse of Mal 2,16a is very hard to translate since the Hebrew is not clear, because different subjects can be considered according to the Hebrew consonants the Masoretic text presents. The problem is presented already in v.15 where God is gravely displeased «against two related facts: divorce and violence»<sup>11</sup>. But how do we deal with the first Hebrew word *kî* in v.16a? It is not irrelevant either be it considered a consecutive particle or the introduction to a conditional clause. It can be recognized at least that the Masoretic text of Mal 2,16a offers two main possibilities. Everything depends on the vocalization which gives us either a partial or a total condemnation of divorce<sup>12</sup>. To have a partial condemnation of divorce it is enough to translate the second Hebrew verb «shalah» as a piel construct infinitive. That would give something like «if someone hates, then divorce himself» or «if someone divorces because of / on hate / hating, thus covers his garments with violence». In this case the Hebrew particle *kî* is assumed as the beginning of a conditional clause. This means exceptions are contemplated. Being the Hebrew root «shalah» a piel construct infinitive and the Hebrew particle *kî* our «if», then everything depends on the first verb «sana'». Be it the case, what we have here is an exception. In the first possibility the subjects of both verbs are different, what brings an occasion in which if you decide to hate the wife of your youth you are entitled to send her away. This would mean a partial condemnation of divorce. Being the subject of «sana'» the third person singular qal perfect or the masculine singular participle

<sup>9</sup> Cf. VINCENZO ROCCO SCATURCHIO, «Unicità e indissolubilità del matrimonio in Mt 19,3-12: chiamata e compito in una pastorale di misericordia», *Vivarium* 21/2 (2013) 145.

<sup>10</sup> PIETER A. VERHOEF, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, [= NICOT], Michigan 1987, 280.

<sup>11</sup> See PIETER A. VERHOEF, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, [= NICOT], Michigan 1987, 278.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. VINCENZO LOPASSO, «Unicità di Dio e matrimonio in Malachia 2,10-16», *Vivarium* 21/2 (2013) 127.



qal, this means that whoever hates the wife of his youth is entitled to the direct object of piel construct infinitive of verb «shalah» (to send away). The other possibility (always considering the Hebrew particle *kî* as the introduction to a conditional clause), would maintain as well an exception for divorce, therefore the condemnation would not be radical. In the second formula («if someone divorces because of / on hate / hating, thus covers his garments with violence»), here too this would mean that in all those cases when someone divorces not because of hate, divorce would be allowed. For instance, adultery would be one of many circumstances when divorce would be justified.

But another vocalization brings in even more problems to define the practice of divorce in Israel in post-exilic times. If we assume again the Hebrew particle *kî* as the introduction to a conditional clause and the following two verbs as a cluster forming the prothesis in this conditional clause, this would mean that the second part of the verse (... «thus covers his garments with violence») would be the apodosis, thus enforcing a circumstance in which if you don't like divorcement, if you refuse to hate the spouse of your youth you gather violence upon you. Divorce would become almost a habit. Rebuked would be all those who would not accept this tradition, this custom. Yet, the critique in v.15 and the context do not allow such a translation, even when the LXX and the targumim assume the Hebrew particle *kî* as «if» and justify divorce just for «hate».

A total condemnation of divorce may be brought by considering just a qal participle of the first verb «sana'». Whether in the third or first person the effect is the same, for God is always the subject. There we would have «I [God] hate divorce [to send away]»<sup>13</sup>, or «He [God] hates divorce [the sending away]»<sup>14</sup>. This translation has the support of another texts (Is 50,1 and Dt 22,19), where the verb «shalah» is used in the sense it is used here (to send away, to divorce), being God Himself who says in the first person singular «I sent her away» (*shilahtyîha* Is 50,1); «send her away» (*leshallehah* Dt 22,19). In this case the hebrew particle *kî* has its usual consecutive meaning. On the other hand, the piel construct infinitive of the second verb appears as a direct object, what makes God's refusal on divorce total and radical. Besides, assuming the first person of God as He who speaks in this case, eventhough the personal pronoun «anôkî» does not come up, keeps entirely in continuity with the direct speech the verse reflects.

<sup>13</sup> This is the option of VINCENZO LOPASSO, «Unicità di Dio e matrimonio in Malachia 2,10-16», *Vivarium* 21/2 (2013) 126. Here, the Hebrew verb «to send away» (shalah) is translated as a piel construct infinitive serving as a direct object.

<sup>14</sup> We follow here PIETER A. VERHOEF, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, [= NICOT], Michigan 1987, 278 and Vincenzo Lopasso.



### 3. Family life in Israel

In Israel divorce was tolerated as long as the husband had any doubt his spouse had not been a virgin:

«<sup>13</sup> Suppose a man marries a woman, but after going in to her, he dislikes her<sup>14</sup> and makes up charges against her, slandering her by saying, 'I married this woman; but when I lay with her, I did not find evidence of her virginity'.<sup>15</sup> The father of the young woman and her mother shall then submit the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate.<sup>16</sup> The father of the young woman shall say to the elders: 'I gave my daughter in marriage to this man but he dislikes her;<sup>17</sup> now he has made up charges against her, saying, 'I did not find evidence of your daughter's virginity.' But here is the evidence of my daughter's virginity'. Then they shall spread out the cloth before the elders of the town.<sup>18</sup> The elders of that town shall take the man and punish him;<sup>19</sup> they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver (which they shall give to the young woman's father) because he has slandered a virgin of Israel. She shall remain his wife; he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives.<sup>20</sup> If, however, this charge is true, that evidence of the young woman's virginity was not found,<sup>21</sup> then they shall bring the young woman out to the entrance of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death, because she committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.<sup>22</sup> If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel» (Dt 22,13-21).

Unfaithfulness was punished with the «water of bitterness»:

«<sup>11</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>12</sup> Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If any man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him,<sup>13</sup> if a man has had intercourse with her but it is hidden from her husband, so that she is undetected though she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her since she was not caught in the act;<sup>14</sup> if a spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife who has defiled herself; or if a spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife, though she has not defiled herself;<sup>15</sup> then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. And he shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley flour. He shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance.<sup>16</sup> Then the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord;<sup>17</sup> the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water.<sup>18</sup> The priest shall set the woman before the Lord, dishevel the woman's hair, and place in her hands the grain offering of remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy. In his own hand

the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse.<sup>19</sup> Then the priest shall make her take an oath, saying, 'If no man has lain with you, if you have not turned aside to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings the curse.'<sup>20</sup> But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority, if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has had intercourse with you,'<sup>21</sup> – let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse and say to the woman – 'the Lord make you an execration and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your uterus drop, your womb discharge;<sup>22</sup> now may this water that brings the curse enter your bowels and make your womb discharge, your uterus drop'. And the woman shall say, 'Amen. Amen'.<sup>23</sup> Then the priest shall put these curses in writing, and wash them off into the water of bitterness.<sup>24</sup> He shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings the curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her and cause bitter pain.<sup>25</sup> The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy out of the woman's hand, and shall elevate the grain offering before the Lord and bring it to the altar;<sup>26</sup> and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering, as its memorial portion, and turn it into smoke on the altar, and afterward shall make the woman drink the water.<sup>27</sup> When he has made her drink the water, then, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause bitter pain, and her womb shall discharge, her uterus drop, and the woman shall become an execration among her people.<sup>28</sup> But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, then she shall be immune and be able to conceive children.<sup>29</sup> This is the law in cases of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself,<sup>30</sup> or when a spirit of jealousy comes on a man and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall set the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall apply this entire law to her.<sup>31</sup> The man shall be free from iniquity, but the woman shall bear her iniquity» (Num 5,11-31).

However, Cant 8,6 praises love, because love is stronger than death. This poem, in which the holy Name of God never appears, despite this it was incorporated in the biblical canon. Therefore it was recognized as *word of God* even if the word «God» is never used. This means that Israel expanded the concept of biblical inspiration up to the point of recognizing that a chant of human love might probably be the best way to praise and talk about the love of God. The enthralling and appealing love between the spouses gives a glance to the love of God. God is a love like that. The alluring love between the spouses became, therefore, to Israel a poetic word through which Israel can describe the project God has to humankind: love. Being love, God plans to be reflected in the love between the spouses. Lovers experience an enticing love up to the point of being irresistible. Thus is the love of God, thus is God. So, the love between the lovers became to Israel a place in which the bodily love speaks of God. In other words,

this love gives words to God, mirrors God and makes God speak. It reveals God. That's one of the reasons it was projected since creation in Gen 1,27-28. And it was kept this promise. In the Book of Revelation, this chant is mirrored in the love the Lamb has for his spouse the Church (Ap 19,1-9; 21,1-2.9) and vice-versa. In a paritarian relationship (thought symbolically in the author's theological mind), the project God has to a family relationship is recapitulated in the Apocalypse, the book of recapitulations. Up until then, matrimony is viewed as a vocation, a path that is given by God. This path, this vocation stands between prophecy and discipleship (*sequela*)<sup>15</sup> remaining opened to life, to new lives, to children and to the other families, in order to build the great family of mankind.

Hence, the prophets have already oriented Israel to this project, to this ideal. The messianic betrothal announces the enlargement of our own family (Is 25,6-9) in the hope of its eschatological fulfillment. God maintained alive His project, His desire of a monogamic family right from creation as the starting point from which He tries to build in the world the civilization of love the couples begin building at home. Throughout Israel's history, this project of a monogamic family was kept between polygamy in the patriarchs' period and the androgynous Hellenistic culture<sup>16</sup>. Thus, it is not strange that Job 31,1.7-12 exalts chastity. According to the very late text of Job 2,9 he has only one wife. The late book of Judith exalts even widowhood as a way of faithfulness towards the dead husband (cf. Jdt 8,2-8; 16,25). The book of Tobit does not present any reference at all to polygamy or to palingamy. Instead, it applauds monogamy and fidelity as token to the couple's life and as a path to true life (cf. Tob 3,17; 4,12-13; 6,16; 7,10-12). But in the second century B.C., Sir 25,24-26 recommended divorce when the woman was disobedient and Sir 28,15 even admits it as punishment to those woman who talked too much and calumniated others.

#### 4. The plan of God in Jesus' family

It is not necessary nor due to convey a radical feminist reading of the Bible<sup>17</sup> to speak about the Jesus message on the family. The studies in Christology, it is true, have more or less neglected the first years Jesus spent in Nazareth, for they have concentrated on the public ministry. The gospel's short narratives of

<sup>15</sup> Cf. VINCENZO ROCCO SCATURCHIO, «Unicità e indissolubilità del matrimonio in Mt 19,3-12: chiamata e compito in una pastorale di misericordia», *Vivarium* 21/2 (2013) 195.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. VINCENZO ROCCO SCATURCHIO, «Unicità e indissolubilità del matrimonio in Mt 19,3-12: chiamata e compito in una pastorale di misericordia», *Vivarium* 21/2 (2013) 161.

<sup>17</sup> For a radical critique of Pauline writings concerning some verses on the place and evaluation of women see JORUNN ØKLAND, «Sex slaves of Christ: a response to Halvor Moxnes», *JSNT* 26/1 (2003) 31-34.

Jesus childhood have not been taken into account when it comes to the sociological context families had to face in first century Galilee. The second and third Quest enables us to conclude on the absence on the concern about family life in first century Galilee<sup>18</sup>. Only recent sociological studies have begun to bring to light all the elements available which grant us a broader and more precise view about this central aspect of Jesus life and Christian doctrine. Even the historical and hermeneutical turn biblical exegesis got with the works of E. P. Sanders<sup>19</sup> did not attain a sufficient approach to the familiar background that helped to shape the worldview of Jesus and to sustain the message about the family in the torah.

As we have seen, in Israel the family was a wider group than it is today. From Solomon times, the temple was a house as well to the family of God. Abraham was invited to leave his father's house, to abandon the family as it was supposed in the jewish tradition when the boy became grown up. That's what was repeated to him in the greek version of Gen 12,1 LXX: leave the *ek tou oikou tou patros sou*. In Jerusalem God allowed Israel to build Him a familiar place. The temple is a familiar place where the family constitutes itself as such<sup>20</sup>. According to Lk 2,39, Jesus attended the temple, visited Jerusalem in the company of his family. This means that right from the start, God wanted His own Son to have a family, to incarnate in a family, to live and grow in a family. The plan God formed in creation was kept in the option Nazareth. God assumed there His self commitment in His own plan. So, in what kind of jewish family does Jesus live in? What did Jesus receive from his family in Nazareth?

The marriage between Mary and Joseph began before the wedding feast, long before. In Mt 1,18 she was not yet fiancée but it was given to Joseph in promise<sup>21</sup>. In Nazareth Jesus received the love of a mother and was tendered by a father. He learned what faithfulness is, what enhanced His own faith in the faithfulness of God. But during herodian times, He got to know just the opposite in jewish society, where divorce was very much facilitated<sup>22</sup>. After Easter,

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<sup>18</sup> According to HALVOR MOXNES, *Poner a Jesús en su lugar Una vision radical del grupo familiar y el Reino de Dios* (Putting Jesus in His place. A Radical vision of Household and Kingdom, Louisville – Kentucky 2003), [= αργονα 18], Estella – Navarra 2005, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. HALVOR MOXNES, *Poner a Jesús en su lugar Una vision radical del grupo familiar y el Reino de Dios* (Putting Jesus in His place. A Radical vision of Household and Kingdom, Louisville – Kentucky 2003), [= αργονα 18], Estella – Navarra 2005, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. CHARLES PERROT, *Marie de Nazareth au regard des chrétiens du premier siècle*, [= LeDiv 255], Paris 2013, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. D. INSTONE-BREWER, «Jewish Women Divorcing their Husbands in Early Judaism: The Background to Papyrus Se'elim 13», *HTR* 92 (1999) 349-357; IDEM, «1 Corinthians 7 in the light of Greco-Roman Marriage and Divorce Papyri», *TyndB* 52 (2001) 101-116; IDEM, «1 Corinthians 7 in the light of Jewish Greek and Aramaic Marriage and Divorce Papyri», *TyndB* 52 (2001) 225-243; IDEM,

the Pauline communities, due to the new situation aroused from conversions to faith from heathen members, had to deal with mixed marriages. This required some «practical warrant for the compromise»<sup>23</sup>.

Jesus lived in a divorcistic society. There, He kept the sixth commandment of the Law and recorded the Word of God, the plan of God from Gen 2,24 right from creation<sup>24</sup>. Jesus enters into discussion against the Pharisees to defend monogamic family, in times when polygamy was frequent and when conditions for divorcement were much smoothed. Nevertheless, Jesus destroys home as a structured place according to the patterns of first century Judaism patriarchal society<sup>25</sup> when He receives female disciples in his group. Jesus finds a much plural Judaism («vielgestaltig»)<sup>26</sup>. Jesus plural Judaism had assumed divorce as very convenient and even lawful, as the text of Dt 24,1-4 shows. Even to the strict essenian sect by the skirts of the Dead Sea celibacy was not forbidden nor impossible. The same happened in Jerusalem, where divorce as well was not at all totally forbidden, and in some texts from Qumran (cf. CD 4,20-5,2; 13,17; 11QT 54-57)<sup>27</sup>. First century Judaism does not know a «strict divorce prohibition»<sup>28</sup>. In this context some indifference did occur. But Jesus is radical in his critique on divorce (cf. Mk 10,11 // Lk 16,18) for that is the teaching of the Father. He goes thus against what was supposed to be politically correct and not disturbing. Yet the question remains: is Jesus totally absolute in this critique? At least it can be acknowledged that in such a way He puts Himself against a certain jewish ideology, because when Jesus criticizes the jewish practices of his days He stands within the wisdom (cf. Sir 7,26; 23,22-24) and theological tradition that came to Him and to Israel before Moses, from creation. So now

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*Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible. The Social and Literary Context*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2002 [= [www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/brewer/MarriagePapyri/1Cor\\_7](http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/brewer/MarriagePapyri/1Cor_7)].

<sup>23</sup> BERNARD S. JACKSON, «Holier than Thou»? *Marriage and Divorce in the Scrolls, the New Testament and Early Rabbinic Sources*. In IDEM, *Essays on Halakah in the New Testament*, [= *Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 16*], Leiden – Boston 2008, 225.

<sup>24</sup> See our work «Jesus perante o divórcio e a família», *Humanística e Teologia* 33/2 (2012) 359-377, from which we assume here a great deal of material.

<sup>25</sup> In agreement with HALVOR MOXNES, *Poner a Jesús en su lugar Una vision radical del grupo familiar y el Reino de Dios* (Putting Jesus in His place. A Radical vision of Household and Kingdom, Louisville – Kentucky 2003), [=  $\alpha\gamma\omicron\pi\alpha$  18], Estella – Navarra 2005, 116.131. This thesis assumes «place» (not time) as the criterion to evaluate the options Jesus made to broaden his family.

<sup>26</sup> INGO BROER, *Jesus und die Tora*. In LUDGER SCHENKE u.a. (hrsg.), *Jesus von Nazaret – Spuren und Konturen*, Stuttgart 2004, 221.

<sup>27</sup> In this sense see G. BRIAN, *Divorce at Qumran*. In M. BERNSTEIN – F. GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ – J. KAMPEN (dir.), *Legal Texts and Legal Issues. Festschrift J. M. Baumgarten*, Leiden 1997, 244.

<sup>28</sup> INGO BROER, *Jesus und die Tora*. In LUDGER SCHENKE u.a. (hrsg.), *Jesus von Nazaret – Spuren und Konturen*, Stuttgart 2004, 234.

the question is adequate: as a teaching, is the critique of Jesus on divorce something new?<sup>29</sup>

The Pharisees used Dt 24,1-4 as a more important law than the sixth commandment. So Jesus does not want to establish any new regulation. He knows, and the Pharisees too, that Dt 24,1-4 is not part of the law God gave to Moses on Sinai<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, they have leveled both texts. Consequently, Jesus reminds that Dt 24,1-4 was introduced into the law due to the stubbornness and to the hardship of their heart. Moses has just tolerated such a practice, he has not legislated on it (cf. Mt 19,8).

Jesus is, therefore, radical in his critique on the divorce. This critique can be accounted with great «certainty»<sup>31</sup> up to the historical Jesus. But it seems He is not absolute according to the Mt 19,9. The text as it is does not eliminate the possibility of palingamy when something happens due to «immorality»<sup>32</sup>. In fact, it is very relevant that in order to speak of adultery the New Testament chooses in Q the other verb «moiceuthênai» (cf. Lc 16,18 // Mc 10,11). Moreover, the word «porneia» in the prophets translates in the Septuaginta the Hebrew root «zanah», which can have various meanings concerning unfaithfulness. This «immorality» can happen in economic fields, social, juridical, and commercial (cf. Am 8,1-4; Ap 18,12-13).

Hence, Jesus stands for the monogamic family living from indissolubility. But before Him one has to choose, even if it causes tension (cf. Q 12,51.53)<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, when Jesus begins his public ministry He does not choose to form a family of his own<sup>34</sup>. To live in celibacy was not impossible nor in first century

<sup>29</sup> Armand Puig i Tàrrach classifies the «no» of Jesus as absolute and not as radical: «en qualsevol cas, tant Mt como 1Co matisen el caràcter absolut del no de Jesús al divorci»: ARMAND PUIG I TÀRRECH, *El lloc del Jesús de la història i de la història de Jesús en l'Évangeli de Pau*. In IDEM (a cura de), *Pau, Fundador del Cristianisme?*, [= Scripta Biblica 12], Abadia de Montserrat – Tarragona 2012, p.98 nota 30. He is followed by many others, among whom JOHN PAUL MEIER, *Un Certain Juif Jésus Les données de l'histoire IV La Loi et l'amour*, [= LeDiv], Paris 2009, 88; FRANCESCO DI FELICE, *Indissolubilità matrimoniale?*. In PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER LA FAMIGLIA (a cura di), *Lexicon Termini ambigui e discussi su famiglia, vita e questioni etiche*, Bologna 2003, 485.487.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. JUAN ANTONIO R., *Durezza di cuore. Possibilità future?*. In PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER LA FAMIGLIA (a cura di), *Lexicon Termini ambigui e discussi su famiglia, vita e questioni etiche*, Bologna 2003, 267.

<sup>31</sup> This is the classical approach: INGO BROER, *Jesus und die Tora*. In LUDGER SCHENKE u.a. (hrsg.), *Jesus von Nazaret – Spuren und Konturen*, Stuttgart 2004, 237: «Damit ergibt sich mit hoher Sicherheit, dass die Forderung, auf Ehescheidung mit Wiederverheiratung zu verzichten, vom historischen Jesus stammt».

<sup>32</sup> In the same sense INGO BROER, *Jesus und die Tora*. In LUDGER SCHENKE u.a. (hrsg.), *Jesus von Nazaret – Spuren und Konturen*, Stuttgart 2004, 236.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. M. ROBINSON – P. HOFFMANN – J. S. KLOPPENBORG (eds.), *The Critical Edition of Q*, Mineapolis 2000, 380-387. In this research Q 12,52 is not accepted as part of Q.

<sup>34</sup> See JOHN PAUL MEIER, *Un judío marginal Nueva visión del Jesús histórico I Las raíces del problema y de la persona (A Marginal Jew, New York 1991)*, Estella – Navarra 1998, 342; CARLOS GIL ARBIOL, *Los*



Judaism nor in Qumran<sup>35</sup>. Jesus left home to form a larger family: the family of the sons and daughters of God where all are brothers and sisters and One alone is our heavenly Father.

Closer to this project it will be the model Paul announces for the family. It is useful to revisit the all chapter of 1 Cor 7. This pattern continues the outline Jesus has for a family, a family in which the woman is respected at the same level the husband is and wants it to be. Paul continues to put monogamic family between prophecy and mission, between vocation (gift) and eschatological fulfillment:

«Now for the questions about which you wrote. Yes, it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman; <sup>2</sup> yet to avoid immorality every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband. <sup>3</sup> The husband must give to his wife what she has a right to expect, and so too the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and in the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup> You must not deprive each other, except by mutual consent for a limited time, to leave yourselves free for prayer, and to come together again afterwards; otherwise Satan may take advantage of any lack of self-control to put you to the test. <sup>6</sup> I am telling you this as a concession, not an order. <sup>7</sup> I should still like everyone to be as I am myself; but everyone has his own gift from God, one this kind and the next something different. <sup>8</sup> To the unmarried and to widows I say: it is good for them to stay as they are, like me. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry, since it is better to be married than to be burnt up. <sup>10</sup> To the married I give this ruling, and this is not mine but the Lord's: a wife must not be separated from her husband- <sup>11</sup> or if she has already left him, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband – and a husband must not divorce his wife. <sup>12</sup> For other cases these instructions are my own, not the Lord's. If one of the brothers has a wife who is not a believer, and she is willing to stay with him, he should not divorce her; <sup>13</sup> and if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to stay with her, she should not divorce her husband. <sup>14</sup> You see, the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through the brother. If this were not so, your children would be unclean, whereas in fact they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbeliever chooses to leave, then let the separation take place: in these circumstances, the brother or sister is no longer tied. But God has called you to live in peace: <sup>16</sup> as a wife, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your husband; as a husband, how can you tell whether you are to be the salva-

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*orígenes de Jesús*. In RAFAEL AGUIRRE – CARMEN BERNABÉ – CARLOS GIL ARBIOL, *Jesús de Nazaret*, [= *Qué se sabe de ... I*], Estella – Navarra 2009, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL MEIER, *Un judío marginal Nueva visión del Jesús histórico I*, 345.347.



tion of your wife? <sup>17</sup> Anyway let everyone continue in the part which the Lord has allotted to him, as he was when God called him. This is the rule that I give to all the churches. <sup>18</sup> If a man who is called has already been circumcised, then he must stay circumcised; when an uncircumcised man is called, he may not be circumcised. <sup>19</sup> To be circumcised is of no importance, and to be uncircumcised is of no importance; what is important is the keeping of God's commandments. <sup>20</sup> Everyone should stay in whatever state he was in when he was called. <sup>21</sup> So, if when you were called, you were a slave, do not think it matters – even if you have a chance of freedom, you should prefer to make full use of your condition as a slave. <sup>22</sup> You see, anyone who was called in the Lord while a slave, is a free-man of the Lord; and in the same way, anyone who was free when called, is a slave of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You have been bought at a price; do not be slaves now to any human being. <sup>24</sup> Each one of you, brothers, is to stay before God in the state in which you were called. <sup>25</sup> About people remaining virgin, I have no directions from the Lord, but I give my own opinion as a person who has been granted the Lord's mercy to be faithful. <sup>26</sup> Well then, because of the stress which is weighing upon us, the right thing seems to be this: it is good for people to stay as they are. <sup>27</sup> If you are joined to a wife, do not seek to be released; if you are freed of a wife, do not look for a wife. <sup>28</sup> However, if you do get married, that is not a sin, and it is not sinful for a virgin to enter upon marriage. But such people will have the hardships consequent on human nature, and I would like you to be without that. <sup>29</sup> What I mean, brothers, is that the time has become limited, and from now on, those who have spouses should live as though they had none; <sup>30</sup> and those who mourn as though they were not mourning; those who enjoy life as though they did not enjoy it; those who have been buying property as though they had no possessions; <sup>31</sup> and those who are involved with the world as though they were people not engrossed in it. Because this world, as we know, it is passing away. <sup>32</sup> I should like you to have your minds free from all worry. The unmarried man gives his mind to the Lord's affairs and to how he can please the Lord; <sup>33</sup> but the man who is married gives his mind to the affairs of this world and to how he can please his wife, and he is divided in mind. <sup>34</sup> So, too, the unmarried woman, and the virgin, gives her mind to the Lord's affairs and to being holy in body and spirit; but the married woman gives her mind to the affairs of this world and to how she can please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I am saying this only to help you, not to put a bridle on you, but so that everything is as it should be, and you are able to give your undivided attention to the Lord. <sup>36</sup> If someone with strong passions thinks that he is behaving badly towards his fiancée and that things should take their due course, he should follow his desires. There is no sin in it; they should marry. <sup>37</sup> But if he stands firm in his resolution, without any compulsion but with full control of his own will, and decides to let her remain as his fiancée, then he is acting well. <sup>38</sup> In other words, he who marries his fiancée is doing well, and he who does not, better still. <sup>39</sup> A

wife is tied as long as her husband is alive. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anybody she likes, only it must be in the Lord.<sup>40</sup> She would be happier if she stayed as she is, to my way of thinking – and I believe that I too have the Spirit of God» (1 Cor 7,1-40).

This topic is retrieved few years latter in Rom 7,1-3

«As people who are familiar with the Law, brothers, you cannot have forgotten that the law can control a person only during that person's lifetime.<sup>2</sup> A married woman, for instance, is bound to her husband by law, as long as he lives, but when her husband dies all her legal obligation to him as husband is ended.<sup>3</sup> So if she were to have relations with another man while her husband was still alive, she would be termed an adulteress; but if her husband dies, her legal obligation comes to an end and if she then has relations with another man, that does not make her an adulteress».

Paul testifies hereby the mutual relation in marriage as a parity one. Thus, Paul goes much further than over the divorce libel of Moses. He announces the monogamic marriage and its indissolubility as Jesus' revelation, not just a word of his own or even his own opinion. Such a monogamy based family allows to make an experience of God. In 1 Cor 7 Paul goes beyond and presents a radical innovation to the surrounding jewish and greek worlds<sup>36</sup>. In 1 Cor 7 the woman appears in total parity with the husband, what was not the case in these two cultural and religious worlds. There, women had *de facto* and *de jure* a non equality status. Following Mt 19,9, Paul does not distort the radical critique Jesus made on divorce. The famous pauline privilege endorses Mt 19,9. The apostle agrees in 1 Cor 7,15 that divorce might happen, but only as the option undertaken by the unfaithful member of the couple.

In Eph 5,31 Paul reaffirms the project of God from Gen 2,24. In Eph 5,32 Paul assumes all the mystery of love between husband and wife to draw the relationship between Christ and the Church. He tries to compare the relationship of parity between the husband and his wife to the uneven relationship between Christ and the Church. So, life within the monogamic family living from indissolubility maps out something of what happens between Christ and the Church, thus becoming a paramount analogy.

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<sup>36</sup> In his work, W. DEMING, *Paul on marriage and celibacy. The hellenistic background of 1 Corinthians 7*, Cambridge 1995 presents the initial response of Paul in v.1 as a confrontation the Apostle had with the stoic atmosphere of Corinth, in which Paul tries to establish a dialogue with stoicism in order to help his brothers Christians in the Corinthian community.

## 5. The family of God

On commenting Gen 1,27, Karl Barth determines the essence of human being from the nature of Trinitarian relationship. The revelation of this Trinitarian being comes upon mankind to be fulfilled and accomplished as a mission, as a mirror: «it cannot reflect but only contradict the determination of man to be God's covenant-partner, nor can the God who is no *Deus solitarius* but *Deus triunus*, God in relationship, be mirrored in a *homo solitarius*» (KD III.4 §54). Therefore, if parents are not to be let alone, the same goes to the children who ask to be cared for and kindhearted<sup>37</sup>. This explains why God Himself wanted His own Son to be born in home, in a family. Nevertheless, the freedom and gracious intervention of the Holy Spirit in Mary shifted the regard much more beyond the boundaries of Nazareth and Judaism. Right from the beginning God tells in Nazareth that natural bonds are not the only distinctive element to redefine a family. Besides, Jesus will leave home when He is grown up. This does not mean that Jesus displeased his family or disliked her. On the contrary, He entrusted the family of his disciples to his mother at the very end by the cross (Jo 19,27). Without denying any need of a family nor the need of a cradle, Jesus moves away from his family home in Nazareth, because He discovered the bigger and larger family of God, based neither on natural bonds nor in legacies. Even the life of Jesus points to a certain defamiliarization, it points to the departure from natural family. We cannot say that Jesus destroyed the family just for being single and leaving home to form a group of several disciples. But it is true that with Jesus we find certain *dissolution* from the traditional Jewish family: «the term 'dissolution' is used here because it comprehends all the relevant texts, even though many of these texts might better be described by the term 'renunciation' of family ties. Obviously, the dissolution of family ties is closely related to the issue of the homelessness or itinerancy of early followers of Jesus»<sup>38</sup>. This homelessness and itinerancy appears soon in Q 9,57-58; 9,59-60; 10,4; 12,22-31;

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<sup>37</sup> «... die ursprüngliche Beziehung von Eltern und Kindern in der Kernfamilie nicht zu ersetzen ist. Theologisch entspricht sie dem Schöpfer- und Erlöserwillen Gottes und anthropologisch den Bedürfnissen des Kindes nach Zuverlässiger Zuwendung und Versorgung. Auch soziologisch liess sich bestätigen, dass der Familie die entscheidenden Funktionen der Reproduktion, Sozialisation und Plazierung, der Haushaltsführung und Freizeitgestaltung sowie des familiären Spannungsausgleich erhalten geblieben sind oder an Bedeutung gewonnen haben. Zugleich aber wurde deutlich, dass die Familie zur Wahrnehmung dieser Funktionen mit dem Älterwerden der Kinder in erhöhtem Masse der Unterstützung bedarf, um die Kinder in angemessener Weise in das Leben begleiten und entlassen zu können»: SIEGFRIED KEIL, «Familie 5. Familienberatung und Familienbildung», TRE XI (1983) 16.

<sup>38</sup> A. D. JACOBSON, *Jesus against the family. The dissolution of family ties in the Gospel tradition*. In JON MA. ASGEIRSSON – KRISTIN DE TROYER – MARVIN W. MEYER (eds.), *From Quest to Q Festschrift James M. Robinson*, [= BETL 146], Leuven 2000, 189.

12,51-53; 14,26; 16,13.28. There we discover that there was some tension between Jesus and his family. His natural family did not understand the options He took to preach the kingdom of God in some sort of wanderlust. So they went after Him. When they met Him, they thought He was out of His mind

<sup>31</sup> Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you'. <sup>33</sup> And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' <sup>34</sup> And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. <sup>35</sup> Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'» (Mk 3:31-35).

This answer Jesus gives is noteworthy, for it establishes the criteria to form the new family of God, not based by inheritance nor by blood: «an alternative family is defined not by blood or marriage but by doing the will of God. The composition of Jesus' true family is inclusive – women and men, old and young. Here, moreover, the idea of the relativization of the family seems evident; though we are not told why doing the will of God must be in tension with one's family ties»<sup>39</sup>. The family of Jesus does not contradict God's plan for the family. Jesus too needed a family to begin to learn the love of God. Despite this need, Jesus followed His vocation, even if his own home family did not understand Him at first. Even if Jesus had to remember God's plan from creation, He pointed to its fulfillment at the end of times. Jesus didn't look just to the past but to the future as well. He hoped and preached the completion of our hopes and desires, which sprout as well from the family. Even if He has chosen to live in celibacy, Jesus preached the good news of the family. So He formed his own family, a broader family with only one Father – God. Family to Jesus is good news, is a fortunate experience of faithfulness and monogamy, where divorce is forbidden because it stands against God's project to the human family. Sometimes the religious discourse of the Church on family themes forgets that the theological principle of incarnation made family not only object but above all subject in the experience of faith<sup>40</sup>. This indicates, like in the times of Jesus, that reality goes far beyond the law for

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<sup>39</sup> A. D. JACOBSON, *Jesus against the family. The dissolution of family ties in the Gospel tradition*. In JON MA. ASGEIRSSON – KRISTIN DE TROYER – MARVIN W. MEYER (eds.), *From Quest to Q Festschrift James M. Robinson*, [= BETL 146], Leuven 2000, 203.

<sup>40</sup> According to the advice of RAINER LACHMANN, «Familie X. Praktisch-theologisch», *4RGG* (2000) 23: «Praktische Theologie betrachtet die Familie heute nicht primär als Objekt, sondern eher als besonder Ort und Subjekt im Vollzug religiöses Lebens und Lernens, Glaubens und Feierns, Betratens und Bildens. Dabei ist die Realität und Pluralität der verschiedenen Familienformen ebenso in Rechnung zu stellen wie die grosse Bandbreite im Verhältniss zw. Familien und kirchlichen Gemeinde, die im volksskirchlichen Rahmen partizipiert am neuzeitlich verfassten Christentums in seiner individuellen, öffentlichen oder kirchlichen Ausprägung».

life is richer than the law. This happens looking to creation, to Genesis, but looking to eschatology too when we will be all in God:

«<sup>28</sup> 'In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her'.<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, 'You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.<sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven'» (Mt 22:28-30).